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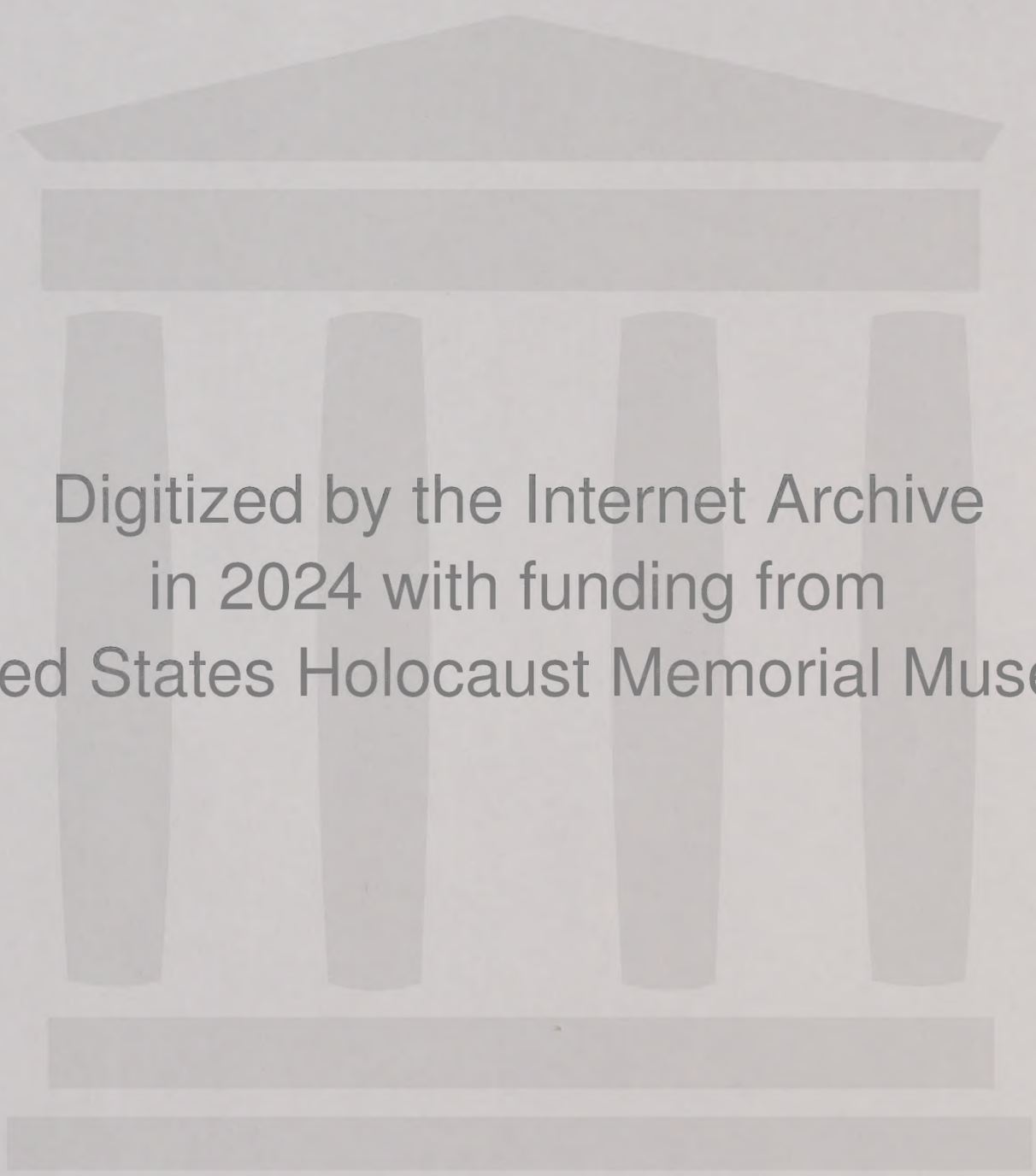
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To Auschwitz and Back: an Odyssey

I was born in Budapest and grew up in the small Czechoslovakian town of Topolcany. Rural Topolcany is tucked away in the Nitra River Valley in Slovakia, where events of the outside world seemed to pass it by. Topolcany was a community of perhaps thirteen thousand people, most of whom were Roman Catholic ; although for its size it also had a significant Jewish population, and a synagogue.

The center of Topolcany was a square, and in the center of the square stood a Catholic church. All sorts of shops owned by Jewish merchants lined the square. Through one gate, you entered a courtyard surrounded by a large building boasting a tower. This was our city hall. Topolcany's police station, city jail, library and government offices were located in the back of the building. The front was used for private apartments, mostly rented by professionals -- the town veteranarian, lawyer, dentist and physician -- my father, Dr. Max Eisdorfer. On the floor below our apartment were my father's waiting and examining rooms. On the ground floor there were also a drogeria (drugstore), bank, and a store called Trafica, which sold sundries such as stamps, postcards and cigarettes. In the courtyard stood a well, providing cool water for any passerby.

The upper floor of city hall was connected by a balcony. In summer, we would sit on the bench outside our apartment, and watch a continuous stream of people -- children on their way to school, peasants on their way to market -- pass through the courtyard. I was most interested in the gypsies in their flamboyantly-colored outfits. When they got caught stealing a chicken, they would spend the night in jail. We could hear them cry the entire night, so my mother would send me downstairs with food that I would deliver to the gypsies through the grates of the jail windows. On Thursdays, the square became a lively marketplace where peasant women from

neighboring villages brought chicken, geese and ducks to sell. The live fowl made a terrible racket.

I led a quiet and sheltered childhood. I lived with my mother and father, our cook Marka and her sister Raska. Family life revolved around my father, and his was intertwined with the lives of the townspeople. His "day" often began in the middle of the night, with a pregnant woman in labor. My father would sit patiently at her bedside, hold her hand , speak soothingly and provide reassurance to the rest of the family. Later he would rejoice in helping to bring another one of his "children" into the world.

Sometimes my father would travel to another village to treat a patient. If it was wintertime, and the ground was covered with a blanket of snow, my father would ride in a horse-driven sleigh loaded with hay. He would let me invite along as many friends as could squeeze on.

My father's position as the town's only physician lent our family prominence. I would proudly walk with him through the town, accompanying him on his housecalls, as everyone greeted us. I was known as the "little mensch from Dr. Eisdorfer."

My father had attended medical school in Budapest, where he met my mother, and moved to Topolcany to begin his practice. Father was well-read and liked to recite poetry. He also loved art and enjoyed dabbling with paint. His devotion to his patients earned him the respect of Jews and non-Jews alike. The religious Catholics were impressed that my father was an observant Jew. They knew they could always find him praying or learning in the synagogue if he were not in his office. There were few "Topolcaners" who were not fond of him. Occasionally he gave lectures on his general medical views. One of his educational aims was to wean the townsfolk away from superstitious beliefs. Some of his

patients believed that evil spirits had made them ill, and others would return home if a black cat crossed their path on the way to the doctor.

My father had great compassion for the poor, and was always available to anyone who was ill. He never asked for a fee when his patients couldn't afford it. They demonstrated their gratitude by presenting him with whatever they had — sometimes it was bread or milk. My father was the ideal "village doctor," one that seldom existed even then. He saved the lives of many, and the time would come when he would be repaid for his good deeds.

My mother , Rose, was a meticulous housekeeper, and very artistic and well-read. She loved to play the piano, and raised some eyebrows by playing tennis with the local gentiles. I served as the "ball girl," collecting all the stray tennis balls and throwing them back to the players. I also accompanied my mother on her shopping expeditions, carrying my own basket over my arm. Mother would ruffle the feathers of the chickens, checking to see if their skin was yellow and the birds looked well-fed.I carried the hen's freshly laid eggs in my basket.

Looking back, it now seems as if Topolcany existed in a different age. It had its local nobility, a wealthy Baron, who lived with his family in a one-hundred room castle on a wooded estate. The Baron's fields were tilled by peasants whose parents and grandparents had worked the same land. On special occasions, we were allowed to ride through the estate on a small, open-air railroad (the "Trezinka"). At times the air was filled with the sweet smell of the Baron's sugar beet factory.

One of my warmest childhood memories is of Marka, our dedicated cook . She was like a member of the family and she loved to spoil me. Marka would pretend to be a pony and give me sleigh rides through the snow, although her poor feet must have suffered afterwards. When I was ill, she would sit beside my bed, and serve delicious hot chocolate to her "decko," or child.

When I was three years old, my parents hired a young German woman to be my governess. Her duties were to teach me proper table manners and speak with me exclusively in German — "the language of the educated." Little did I anticipate how useful that knowledge of German would become. After a few years my German was good enough to dispense with my governess, much to my relief . I began learning English, and started taking piano lessons as well. My mother, who was an accomplished piano player, and able to improvise tunes she heard at the cinema or on the radio, was frustrated by my lack of talent.

My best friend was named Herta Feher. Her grandparents owned a hotel on the square that featured a restaurant and ballroom. In summer, fresh ice cream was served on the terrace, and Herta and I were served like proper hotel guests by a waiter. Herta's uncle taught us how to play pingpong and fence. When I was in third grade I acquired my first boyfriend, Emilo. In the winter, after school, we went ice skating together on a pond.

As I got older, my interests began to change. Every evening, between the hours of 7 and 9, Herta and I would walk up and down one side of the square, called the "corso." In the winter we would eat fresh roasted chestnuts sold from carts on the street, while eyeing the older boys who passed by. Sometimes the boys would greet us and join our "promenade."

In the afternoons, my mother would settle in with either some mending, crocheting or knitting, and listen to music on the radio, transmitted from Vienna. One afternoon the music was interrupted by harsh German words saying hateful things about the Jews. It was the first time we heard Hitler's voice, and his army had entered Austria.

My father contacted his cousins in the United States, asking them to send us affidavits so that we could emigrate. When my father travelled to Prague with these

precious documents, he was told by the American consulate that the quotas were filled and no more Visas were available.

In 1938 the Hashomer Hatzair Zionist movement established a Hachshara in Topolcany. A wealthy Jewish landowner donated land and a furnished building, and young people from other cities in Slovakia came to live there. A Bulgarian agriculturist taught them how to grow vegetables, and they set up a stand at the market, although the local farmers didn't appreciate the competition. I joined Macabee Hatazair, attending meetings and Oneg Shabbat (Friday night get-togethers), led by a young man from Bratislava. Three years later these activities were banned.

1938 brought the annexation of Austria to Germany, and with it grim news of events in the world outside. Even though we lived next door to Austria and followed the news on the radio, we didn't comprehend the consequences of the Anschluss until refugees passed through Topolcany. We saw the fear and helplessness in the eyes of those who were fleeing for their lives, leaving behind all their possessions in their haste. The Austrian Jews who were guests in our home had suddenly found themselves undesirable in their own homeland simply because they were Jews.

The arm of oppression soon reached into Czechoslovakia. It became ironic that people from neighboring countries still sought refuge with us. In March of 1939, after Germany established Bohemia and Moravia as protectorates, Slovakia was given nominal independence in exchange for cooperation with Germany. The new president of Slovakia was a Catholic priest by the name of Josef Tiso, a puppet of the Nazi regime. Soon afterwards, he issued decrees against the Jews. Poor and uneducated peasants were promised that they would receive property confiscated from Jewish households if they cooperated in harassing Jews and helping to enforce the anti-semitic laws.

As part of its agreement with the Germans, Slovakia decreed that Jewish physicians were forbidden to practice medicine. My father's office was sealed and most of his medical equipment was confiscated. They also took most of our possessions, in ascending value — first ice skates and tennis rackets, then fur collars and other luxuries, and of course, our radio. A non-Jewish "arizotor," or supervisor , was appointed for each Jewish store, and profits had to shared with him.

Not everyone in town was an enemy. The local priest, Father Richter, from whom I had learned Latin in gymnasium, sympathized. My father had helped bring many Catholic children into the world, and had treated the poor without expecting payment. Father Richter tried to influence the Papal Nuncio to intercede with the authorities and exempt my father from the law barring Jews from practicing medicine. Unfortunately, nothing ever came of the priest's efforts on our behalf.

Meanwhile I entered gymnasium (high school) and learned Latin, French, German and Slovak. One day I came to school to find my Slovak professor dressed in the black uniform of the Hlinka guards. He stood in the front of our class, with his hands on his hips, and proceeded to insult the fathers of the Jewish students, including mine. The school always had been attended by both Jewish and Gentile students and we all had been friends until then. I realized that everything had changed when none of the Gentile children spoke up on our behalf. In honesty, neither did we Jews — we were too shocked to say anything after listning to our fathers being berated by a person we always had respected.

Soon afterwards, I was barred from attending school. A curfew was imposed on the Jews, and we were told to construct and wear yellow stars of David. The list of restrictions grew. Jews were not allowed to travel on trains without special permission. Jews were not allowed to go to the movies or visit public places.

These restrictions, much like the Nuremberg Laws, were only the harbingers of the horrors to come.

On Easter the non-Jews marched in a procession around the town square, holding high large crucifixes. Stones were thrown into windows of Jewish homes and stores.

Marka, our beloved cook, was a peasant woman who could neither read nor write, but she had native intelligence and a sense of decency, and above all, she was loyal. One night a woman rang our doorbell, hoping that my father would defy his curfew and the injunction against practicing medicine. Her mother, a long-time patient of my father's, had a heart ailment, and was suffering an acute attack. Marka had answered the door, and aware of my father's devotion to his patients — and the consequence of breaking the law — refused to wake him. The next morning, the woman returned, pointed an accusing finger at Marka and said, "You killed my mother." Marka, a devout Catholic, became greatly depressed, and then severely ill. She couldn't eat or sleep, and despite our loving care, her condition deteriorated. She returned to her native village of Chrabrany, where she died in a matter of weeks.

Marka's death was my brutal introduction to life under the Nazis. My childhood had come to an abrupt end, and I became preoccupied with learning how to adjust to the increasingly harsh laws against us. One way, was to continue my education. My friends and I formed a learning group, and each of us prepared lessons on the subjects we knew best. My favorites were history and geography, and my father equipped me with the maps. We met in each other's homes, and enlisted the advice and assistance of our parents.

The year 1941 was coming to a close, and we decided to celebrate as best we could. My girlfriend Herta lived in a beautiful new home designed by an architecht who had studied in the United States. Herta invited me and two other girls to sleep

over. Gerta, her cousin, and Troute were both Polish refugees who had escaped with their mothers and grandmothers . Our discussions that night were quite gloomy, but at midnight we met some boys who were waiting outside the house, and wished each other a happy new year.

My father did not stop treating patients who depended on him, and during the time he practiced medicine illegally, my room became a makeshift office, and I acted as my father's assistant. My father was not allowed to write prescriptions, so I would memorize them instead and recite them to a sympathetic pharmacist, Mr. Miksad, who was willing to fulfill them. This same man hid my mother's custom-made set of gold-rimmed porcelain during the war, which I still use today. Another pharmacist, Mr. Zaturecki, hid our persian rugs.

In February 1942, the mayor of Topolcany, who also was our neighbor and my father's patient, informed us of the latest order he had received. In March, all girls between the ages of fifteen and seventeen would be deported to work camps. By that time, the word "camp" bore a frightening connotation. The mayor suggested that my father help me escape from Topolcany in the hope of saving my life.

Herta, Troute and Gerta escaped to Hungary at the end of March. None of them knew Hungarian, and they were captured at the border, placed in jail, and from there taken directly to Auschwitz. All three perished within a month. I didn't learn any of this until much later.

My father didn't waste any time getting in touch with his cousin, who had a daughter my age, and lived close to the Hungarian border. He knew of a man who, for a sizable sum, would lead my cousin and me across the border into Hungary, which had not yet established anti-Jewish laws. We were to stay with my aunt who lived in Galanta, a small town not far from the border. At first, I was relieved, after having been confined to the four walls of my home. To get outdoors was a welcome respite, despite the danger. But after the arrangements were finalized, and my

cousin and I put on double layers of clothing and tearfully told our parents goodbye, I had second thoughts. We would become refugees, and might never see our parents again. Still, escaping was a better alternative than being transported to a camp.

We made the first leg of our journey by train, and we sat in separate seats so that if one of us aroused suspicion, the other still might have a chance to escape. After a brief train ride, we got off in pitch-darkness and silently followed our guide. He led us to the edge of the border where we hid in a haystack until the changing of the guards. There we crouched, our hearts racing, wondering if they would shoot us if we were caught. At the moment the guards left their stations, we ran the short distance to the border, staying close to the ground. We got there just before the arrival of the new shift, who arrived somewhat sleepily for duty.

Our guide left us at the house of a country peasant who knew what to do next; he had performed this service before. Exhausted from fear and excitement , we fell right asleep. The peasant woke us up before daybreak, and pointed us towards a road that led to Galanta, where my aunt and her family lived. It was market day, and all the peasants from neighboring villages were carrying their home-grown produce to town. Our host placed baskets of carrots on our arms to disguise us from the police, who were looking for escapees . Our Hungarian wasn't very good, so we kept our mouths shut and our heads down as we walked along, copying the others gaits. We made it to Galanta's town square.

However, in the excitement of preparing for our departure, we forgot that no one had given us my aunt's address. Asking a stranger surely would have aroused suspicion. Guards seemed to be everywhere. Hungary had a food stamp program and she didn't want the burden of feeding foreigners.

Luck was on our side, for we noticed a light on in the basement of a house and, peering through the window,thought we saw a bearded Jew. We risked

knocking on the door, and learning that the man we say was indeed Jewish, asked him if he knew the whereabouts of my relatives. He did and was happy to take us to them.

To our disappointment, my relatives were not glad to see us. Our presence was dangerous for them. Hungary's laws were severe for those who harbored or aided refugees, no matter how closely related. We were crestfallen that we had made our hazardous journey only to be turned away. Still, we didn't want to endanger others. My aunt and uncle saw that we were scared and hungry. After they gave us something to eat, it was decided that one of my cousins would take us to the railroad station and purchase for us tickets to Budapest, where my grandparents and other aunts and uncles lived. Among them they would find a way to shelter us. On the train, I recalled the many happy times I had spent with my relatives. My cousins had taken me to the circus and the amusement parks. They teased me because I was not as sophisticated as they, and because I spoke Hungarian with a heavy Slovak accent.

Although we were in danger, I was young, and looked forward to seeing my relatives again. We got off the train in Budapest and walked to my grandparents' home. Their only granddaughter, I always had been a favorite visitor. As I rang the doorbell, I anticipated seeing their joyful faces. Instead, we were faced with grim looks of fear. My grandparents had not realized that the situation had worsened in Slovakia, and were worried about our presence. Although there were no official anti-Jewish laws, they risked heavy penalties for harboring refugees. However, they too felt they couldn't just send us away. Where were we to go?

Meanwhile, when my father returned from escorting my cousin and me safely into the hands of our guide, he found all of the Jewish inhabitants of Topolcany packing their belongings. The banks had closed all Jewish accounts. A written order from the authorities was pasted on the wall of the synagogue, ordering all

Jews to gather small packages of no more than sixty kiles and assemble in two days at the railroad station. My father was very decisive. As soon as he read the notice, he contacted the same guide who had taken me to Hungary, and shortly afterwards my parents took the same escape route.

Refugees were pouring into Hungary from all over — Poland and Austria as well as Slovakia — and the Hungarian government began to worry about the Nazis' response. To curry Nazi favor, the police grew more strict and began conducting regular searches. Many a night my parents and I, who were living under assumed names as uncle, aunt and niece, had to escape from the rented room we were hiding in to find shelter in other parts of the city where there were fewer refugees, and where the search, or "razzia," was less intense. We were constantly on the move, until finally, my parents and I decided we could no longer live together in the same apartment.

The constant need to be on guard and ready to escape took its toll. Still, I was young and energetic and felt I could tolerate the situation if it didn't worsen. I even managed to have some fun. My cousins taught me how to dance and escorted me to five o'clock teas. I started wearing lipstick and silk stockings. I was no longer just a kid. I even had a boyfriend from a well-to-do Jewish family. He took me on boat rides and to the theatre.

For a while, I managed to achieve a sense of normalcy. During these years in Hungary, I learned to be resourceful in dangerous situations.After a few weeks in Budapest, my Hungarian improved, and I decided to continue my education. I knew that I could not attend regular classes, because I could be reported to the police. I went to the gymnasium in the district where I lived and told the director that I was sickly, and would complete all my assignments at home. She was willing to accept me on those terms, and I attended school only on the days that exams were given. In this manner, I completed one more grade.

One morning, my luck gave out. I was still asleep in a room rented under an assumed name when two detectives burst in, demanding to see my papers. With one glance, they knew I was an escapee. Before they arrested me, I managed to grab a moment to ask another tenant to tell my "aunt and uncle" what had happened to me and where I was going. The detectives took me to a detention center that was set up in a temple. When my boyfriend found out, he frantically ran to his father's store, unlocked the safe, and withdrew all the money, hoping to buy my release.

In the meantime, my father was working at the Jewish General hospital. As a graduate of the Pasmanyi Medical School in Budapest, he was permitted to be a staff physician, attending primarily patients who were refugees. At other times, we tried to avoid other refugees, since it increased one's chances of getting caught. My father also made house calls, and although he didn't earn much money, at least he was working. Learning of my situation, he tried to find a way to have me transferred to the hospital. There he could watch over me, and as a staff physician, he exercised some authority. As usual, he devised an ingenious solution.

Although my parents could not visit me at the detention center because they would be detained as refugees, my boyfriend was a Hungarian citizen and was permitted to visit me. On one of his visits, my father sent a box of chocolates. Inside, he had packed a small amount of powdered picric acid, a chemical used for making bombs. It tasted horrible and could have caused very severe side effects. But my father knew exactly how much was safe to ingest, and still produce the desired effect. My skin turned yellow, and the whites of my eyes were the color of egg yolks — a clear sign of hepatitis.

The scheme worked. Hepatitis is an extremely contagious disease, and they were terrified of an outbreak at the detention center, where they had to hold refugees until they gathered a sufficient number for deportation. If all of the

detainees became ill, none could be deported. I was transferred immediately to my father's department at the Jewish Hospital.

My illness became very real because the poison had affected my lymph glands, and for a while I suffered with high fever. However, under my father's care the fever subsided, and he showed me how to manipulate the thermometer to register a temperature just high enough to be kept as a patient. When government agents visited the hospital to check for refugees posing as patients, I was left undisturbed.

None the less, my hospital stay could last only so long, and I needed another form of protection. Once again, my father used his contacts to keep me out of danger. After several weeks of my hospitalization, my uncle persuaded his friend to adopt me, as I was still underage. I was free to leave the hospital, but I couldn't leave Budapest without permission, and the authorities continued to check on me. I never got the chance to meet my benefactor, though often I have wondered what would have happened to me without his assistance.

Hungary joined the axis powers in 1941, but it was some time before the German regime began to pay closer attention to Hungary's internal affairs. Then, all young Jewish men were sent to labor camps. My boyfriend was one of them, and I didn't know if we would ever meet again. That winter I was very lonely and depressed.

In the Spring of 1944, the German army marched into Hungary accompanied by military music and fanfare. The Hungarians were expected to welcome the Germans with waves and smiles. The adoption no longer provided me with enough protection. I had to get a job. My father had my name changed again, and produced for me a booklet of references for my work as a maid. In order to obtain a job, I dressed for the part, wearing thick stockings and covering my head with a babushka. Shortly afterwards I got a position with the family of a

Hungarian officer. The work was hard. I lugged heavy carpets out into the courtyard and beat them , and then carried them back upstairs. Although I had never ironed a shirt, my life depended on acquiring that skill. I very quickly learned how to iron, at first sprinkling the laundry with my tears. After a while, I grew accustomed to my chores of washing, ironing and cleaning, knowing I was safer hiding behind the inconspicuous identity of a maid.

I was unable to maintain my disguise for long. Music poured from the radio while I performed my chores, and on one occasion I hummed along with a waltz by Johann Strauss, not thinking anyone would be listening to me. I knew immediately that I had made a grave mistake, when I noticed the family eyeing me with suspicion. Fortunately, they believed I was planted by the Germans to spy on Hungarian officers. I could not return to my job after that incident.

My situation had become perilous, as had that of my parents. My father shaved off his mustache and we bought false identification papers and posed as Gentiles. We moved to Buda, where no one knew us, and rented servants' quarters. The allies began bombing Budapest, and we had to spend many nights sheltered in the basement. When the bombing stopped, we would venture into the streets, to see how many buildings were destroyed. We were glad the allies were bombing, and prayed they would win the war one day soon.

By 1944, several apartment houses in the Jewish neighborhood of Budapest had been designated as a ghetto. Those who weren't already in hiding had to live in the cramped quarters of the ghetto, so that — unknown to them — when Hitler reached Budapest, the Jews would be easy to locate and, according to Hitler's Final Solution, be destroyed.

Our money was running out and my father missed practicing medicine. He began venturing into the ghetto to treat patients. On one of these visits, as he exited an apartment building, my father stumbled into a Razzia and was

apprehended by police detectives. Searching his clothing, they discovered his Jewish papers in one pocket and his false identification in another. The police escorted my father and two other refugees to the subway, in order to take them to the detention center. As the doors swung open at one subway stop, my father yelled, "Look! That one's running away!" When the detectives turned in that direction, my father and another prisoner escaped through a different door.

My father arrived home, gasping for breath, and told us what had happened. We knew we had to escape. The detective had my father's papers and address, and was probably on his way to arrest us. There was no time to waste. We ran out of our building and grabbed the first taxi that came along, but we had no destination to give the driver. Suddenly, my father remembered Rabbi Joynice Steif, a prominent Jewish scholar who he had known since childhood and whose family he had treated without ever accepting payment. In gratitude, Rabbi Steif had told my father that if he ever were in need, he could turn to him. At this time, the Rabbi had limited protection from the Hungarian authorities.

We asked the taxi driver to stop a short distance from Rabbi Steif's apartment, so that if we were being followed, the Rabbi and his family would not be implicated. As we neared his home, we wondered what kind of reception we would receive. A frail-looking man answered the door. He hugged my father and called his wife to welcome us and bring us refreshments. When we explained why we had come so unexpectedly, he assured us that we could stay in his home as long as necessary. We slept there that night and in the morning my father went in search of a more permanent solution. He decided to try to find a way back to Slovakia, although only a small part of Slovakia had been liberated by partisans.

When my father returned, he told us he had learned about a group of German Wehrmacht that had become disillusioned with Hitler's regime and, for a sum, would take us back to Slovakia on an army truck. We had heard that Slovakia had

been liberated by partisans. My father thought it would be a shame for the three of us to travel in an empty truck when so many others could also be saved. He arranged for other refugees to meet us in a small park near the Rabbi Steif's home, in Pest. My father and the Rabbi exchanged a code, in Hebrew, so that we could send a message to let him know whether our escape was a success or failure. This way, the Rabbi would know whether to attempt the same route. Rabbi Steif blessed my parents and me before we walked out into the night in hope of finding a refuge. There were forty-four of us in all, a motley assortment of people, clinging to a last shred of hope.

As we approached the army truck, w e were blinded by a spotlight, and we knew that we had been deceived. In hindsight, we should have known better. But we were desperate, and wanted to believe in the possibility of an escape from our misfortune. Instead, we had fallen into a trap. Soldiers kicked us and shouted obscenities. We were thrown into a truck and sped to Gestapo headquarters in Buda. When we arrived, they informed us that we were political prisoners because we had tried to escape from the Germans.

In prison, the women were separated from the men. The guards were unceasingly cruel. Brutish men, they abused us without reason. I was kicked and beaten as we were shoved into a cell on the fifth floor of the prison. My nose was bleeding from several sharp blows on my face. A pregnant woman in our group began telling her little boy a bedtime story, and as I listened to her soothing voice, I fell asleep.

We were treated worse than criminals. There was only one toilet for all eleven of us, and only one basin of water. In the morning, another prisoner, who was a member of the Jewish elite opened the metal grills of our cell and left us a meager breakfast. I glimpsed a young woman alone in the cell across from ours, doing calisthenics. When she noticed me, she tried to tell me something in sign

language. The cell door closed before I could understand her message.Sometimes, in the afternoon, we were escorted to the prison courtyard, where we were permitted to walk in circles for a half-hour. We were grouped with prisoners from other cells on our floor, and when the guards weren't looking, we told each other how we had gotten arrested. One day, I recognized the young woman from the cell across from mine, and I spoke to her.

She told me that she spent all of her time in solitary confinement. Although her mother was interned in the same prison, they were not allowed to see each other. She had emigrated to Palestine a few years before, leaving her widowed mother and brother behind. The young woman had joined the British army , and trained as a paratrooper. Volunteering for a special assignment, she had parachuted onto the border of Yugoslavia and Hungary. She was betrayed by Croatians and captured. Every day she was taken from her cell to be interrogated. Although the Germans believed she had been involved in espionage, she never revealed the purpose of her mission, or the names of her partners who had escaped. She told me that she rubbed under her eyes bits of coal she found in the truck used to transport her, hoping to evoke sympathy in her interrogators. Her front teeth were missing, but she denied that it was the result of her interrogations. She exercised daily in her cell to maintain her strength. She was psychologically strong, as well. Her demeanor remained cheerful, even though she thought she would be hanged. She never revealed to me the purpose of her mission. The young woman's name — now legendary — was Hana Szenes. She was a heroine, and I was privileged to have met her.

After the war was over, I discovered that she had been executed in the same prison yard, a few weeks before the war ended. She had refused to wear a blindfold. Years later, I visited the military cemetery in Israel where her body lies, and shed tears for her bravery.

As the allied bombings became more frequent, bombs fell near the prison, which was located close to ammunition factories. The allies also may have known that SS headquarters were located underneath the prison. Non-Jewish prisoners were taken to the basement during the bombings, but we were left locked up in our cells. A direct hit would have annihilated us. An old woman led us in a prayer recited before dying.

On July 22, 1944, after three weeks in prison, we were told to pack up our few belongings and prepare to leave. The two pregnant women and their children were separated from us. (I feared the worst, but was relieved to learn that they had been spared Auschwitz, and that they and their children had survived, although their spouses had not.) We were led down the stairs by a Jewish trustee who told us to form a line. Trustees were persons who had been arrested early on, and were considered reliable because they were largely well-to-do— bankers, factory owners and businessmen — and eager to avoid the worst. One of the women trustees returned my handbag, which had been confiscated upon my arrival. When I asked her where we were going, she whispered to me that our destination was Auschwitz.

At the time, I didn't know what that meant, although I assumed it would not bode well. I found a postcard in my bag, and scrawled a message to my boyfriend. I wrote that I was being taken to Auschwitz, not wanting to disappear without a trace. Along the way, I dropped the postcard, hoping that a passerby would find it and throw it in a mailbox. Instead, one of the guards found it. On the train, he held up my message and asked who had written it. I did not respond, and of course, neither did anyone else. The guard threatened us with severe punishment and said he would check each person's handwriting. He never followed up his threat, and I breathed a little easier.

During the transfer, I saw my father, for the first time since our arrest. He was handcuffed to another man. There were twenty-seven of us in all — some were

non-Jews — and we were all classified as "political prisoners" because we had been caught attempting to escape from the German authorities. As political prisoners, we were not transported in the usual manner, packed into airless cattle cars without food or water. This time I was grateful for the Germans' observance of technicalities.

My mother, father and myself, along with twenty others, were taken to the East Railroad Station in Budapest, where we learned that our destination was Auschwitz. We had heard of the death camp, and knew that most of the Slovakian Jews had lost there lives there in 1942, and that millions of others had been exterminated since. Many had died on the way after being brutalized by the guards. Of the remainder, most were gassed to death when they arrived. Our group grew silent as we contemplated the horrors awaiting us.

The Gestapo had "reserved" for us a section of the train to Vienna. The men, chained together, were directed to one small compartment, and the women were crowded into another. We were under constant surveillance, with guards rotating every two hours. It was pathetic and ludicrous, as though we were hardened criminals who required constant vigilance.

Early in the afternoon, the train began to move. I sat in a daze among the other terrified women. The wheels of the train seemed to echo the words: Ausch-witz, Ausch-witz, louder and faster as the train gained speed. I covered my ears, afraid I was going mad. My mother stared straight ahead, peering into a void. At the end of each bench sat an armed SS guard, who didn't take his eyes off of us. We asked the guard, a "Swabian" Hungarian, about rumors we heard of Auschwitz — the beatings and gassings. Although he lied, and told us of pleasant conditions, we remained skeptical. Our suspicions were confirmed when the guards demanded our valuables since, "They will be taken from you anyway, in Auschwitz."

While the others complied, handing over their only possessions — money, watches, small necessities — I went to the bathroom and flushed my own and my mother's jewelry down the toilet. The guards, stuffing their pockets with spoils, became somewhat less hostile .

Several hours later, after arriving at the North Station in Vienna, we were herded together and led on a thirty-minute walk to the police station. Pedestrians stared as we passed, their faces hardening . I couldn't tell whether they felt disgust, fear, or even pity. At police headquarters, we waited several hours for further orders. At nightfall, we were led to yet another railroad station and put on a train. After an interminable night, we arrived at our destination.

As the train began to slow down, I looked out its windows in the early dawn light and saw men clad in blue-and-white striped uniforms, working in fields under the eyes of SS guards. Maybe we were approaching a labor camp. We disembarked at a nondescript little train station named Osweicsm.

The men and women in our group were reunited and the men's handcuffs were removed. My father's wrists were swollen and I hardly recognized him. I turned around to look at him closely and my father said to me softly, "My dear Zusi, that I have to see you here, too!" He was deeply troubled and asked my forgiveness for having denied my earlier request to emigrate to Palestine. It was useless to feel regret. I told my father that, had I been able to choose between imprisonment with my parents and freedom alone, I would have chosen prison. As soon as I said this, my father was separated from my mother and me and led away with the other men to the camp of Auschwitz. I thought I would never see him again. We knew that almost all families who were separated never saw one another again. I was plunged into deep despair.

Led by four young, freckle-faced SS guards, we women marched four kilometers to the camp of Birkenau. The landscape we passed was utterly barren;

no grass, no flowers, no trees, no birds, no sign of life. As we approached the iron gate of Birkenau, a refrain from an old Hungarian folk-song , describing a charming Hungarian cottage, entered my mind: "Trellised gate, trellised window." The massive trellis-work iron gate before me bore the now infamous inscription, "ARBEIT MACHET FREI": WORK MAKES FREEDOM.. As we entered the camp, we were surrounded by tall, black watchtowers and swallowed inside a high-voltage barbed wire fence. Passing through the gate, we were mobbed by strange -looking women, bald and emaciated, wearing striped prison dresses. They grabbed from our hands the remnants of food we still carried.

I saw familiar faces. At first, they didn't seem real, as if they were part of a bad dream: Slovak friends who had been deported in 1942, and whom I never expected to see again. When I asked them about Herta, and other classmates, they pointed to the red smoke emanating from the chimneys. As I stared at them stupidly, they told me bluntly that my friends had been gassed. They told me matter-of-factly that the gas chamber was the only way to leave Auschwitz. This lack of emotion terrified me and I didn't want to believe them.

"You will see with your own eyes what goes on here," one of the girls told me. She continued to confirm my worst fears. Sixty thousand Jews had been deported from Slovakia in 1942. At most, a few hundred were still alive. Friends, family, teachers -- all were gone. "Those of us still alive," warned my friend, "face death daliy. We aren't afraid; we are the living dead. No one has ever left here alive, and no one ever will." As concentration camp inmates, we now existed in an environment of hate and destruction and death. No one spoke to us; only the guards barked out their orders. I thought I had died and had gone to Hell.

The guards used attack dogs to emphasize their orders. "Schnell! Schnell!" If you didn't move fast enough, they set the dogs on you. We ran to the "sauna." We were being processed on a fixed schedule — like pigs at the slaughter house.

In the sauna, they took our belongings and told us to remove our clothes. We were pushed stark naked into an adjoining room, where men cut off the hair on our heads and shaved our pubic hair. We were humiliated before the men and before each other. My mother and I had never seen each other naked. We were thrown into a large room with shower heads and handed soap inscribed "R.J.F.": Rein Judishe Fat (Clean Jewish Fat).

The water was turned on only long enough for us to work up a soapy lather, but not to rinse it off. Again we had to run, "Schnell, Schnell!" My bewildered mother was being shoved along in a state of shock. I was terrified to see her so helpless. We were assaulted by guttural German commands: "Schnell machen! Raus!" Those , like myself, who understand German, were fortunate. Those who didn't just stood still, not knowing what to do. Some became paralyzed with fear, unable to move, and were beaten to death. Others just gave up. Unable to grasp what was being yelled at them, they ceased to function.

We had no towels with which to dry ourselves. We were still wet and soapy when clothes were randomly thrown at us, without attention to size or fit. We were not given any underwear. My dress was short-sleeved, long and black. I wore this dress day in, day out. When we got the chance to rinse out an item, we would spread it on our backs to dry as we worked.

Shoes were crucial to survival. I was fortunate to receive two shoes that matched, and they were almost my size. Most of the others got two odd shoes. Sometimes both were for the right or left foot, or one was flat and the other high-heeled. If you owned the wrong pair of shoes you were doomed. You couldn't walk well, let alone quickly enough to be Schnell, and you suffered the consequences.

As part of the processing of prisoners, we were color-coded according to our "crime." My dress had a red stripe painted on the back. My prisoner number was sewn onto the left side of my bodice and a yellow triangle -- identifying me as a Jew

-- was sewn underneath. Since that identification was not sufficient for the Nazis, a number was tattooed on my left forearm, and underneath it , too, a triangle. Even in Auschwitz, there were instances when we clung to our old habits, even when it would seem absurd . My mother noticed that the job was done more esthetically by some tattooers than others. She found one woman who did especially meticulous work, and she pushed me into her line. The tattooing, which was accomplished using a special ink and blunt needle, was painful and dehumanizing. My arm became inflamed and swollen. I became number 82589 and my mother was number 82588.A number of times people have asked me why I never had my number removed. I tell them there are those who claim the Holocaust never happened. My arm bears witness to the truth, and always will. Many people don't know that the forearms of the SS men were tattooed as well.

I had assumed several different identities while escaping from the Nazis, but now I had none. I was no longer a person, just a number. Hearing my number called would mean the end — death in the gas chamber. There were days when I didn't care if I were selected ; or thought I didn't. But, most of the time, I lived in constant fear of hearing my number, or my mother's, selected. I tried my best to be unobtrusive, to disappear into the crowd. The Nazis had succeeded in reducing most of us to shadows.

Maybe they had numbered us for identification if we tried to escape. But escape was not even a remote possibility. The electrified barbed wire fence, the watch towers, the armed guards and the attack dogs made even the idea of escape futile. Those desperate enough to attempt it were caught and publicly executed — their bodies left hanging for others to see and understand the hopelessness of such an attempt. It was announced that for every prisoner who managed to escape, ten others would be hanged. There were many "crimes" punishable by execution. We witnessed many hangings.

There were those who decided that if death was inevitable, there was no need to continue to accept the pain and misery that lead to it. I discovered that my former classmate, Emilio, who had been deported before me, had thrown himself onto the electric wires. I knew of a girl who worked with the "Leichenkommandos" (those assigned to handle corpses) and whose job was to drag bodies off the wires. She often struggled with corpses too heavy for her to carry. She finally gave up and ended her life the same way as her charges.

The first evening in Auschwitz we were led to Block Number 30. It was a large wood barracks designed to accommodate at most two hundred persons. Approximately one thousand women were assigned to sleep there. We had no sheets, no towels, no pajamas. Endless rows of triple-tiered bunks lined the barracks. Each bunk, with room for four, held eight women. There was so little space that each of us slept on her side and couldn't turn. But if one person got an ache and needed to turn, everyone else had to as well. Nevertheless, I was so exhausted that I had little trouble falling asleep.

"AUFSTEHEN! KAFFEE HOLEN! APPELL! We were awakened by shrieking voices at all hours of the night. It didn't take long to get ready, since all I owned was the dress that I had slept in. We were chased out side to the assembly area in front of the barracks, where we stood in squad-like formations, five across and five lengthwise. All I could see at that hour was darkness. Even in daylight, the camp was so huge you couldn't see from one end to the other. This dark and dismal place seemed to extend forever into the horizon.

Orders were barked at us, first in Polish, and then in German. "RENCE NA RAMENA! " "AUSRICHTEN!" (Hands on shoulders!) The female German guards were no less brutal than their male colleagues. They used the whips tucked into their boots frequently and with gusto. One had to move quickly when orders were shouted.

We stood at attention for hours, while they counted us like herds of sheep. "Zahlappell" (roll call) seemed to last forever because the entire camp was counted at the same time, and if the tally was not satisfactory, we would have to stand through the whole process again, without moving. During the morning Zahlappell, the daily bread ration was distributed. It was made mostly of sawdust laced with bromide, a sedative. The Zahlappell ended when the German capo arrived. "RECHTSCHAU!" The troop of ragged women marched in a pathetic parade before the SS officers.

Once during Zahlappel, an SS guard walked over to where I stood with my mother and ordered her to step out of line. At that moment, a miracle occurred. As I looked down, I noticed what looked like a fragment of lipstick on the ground. I frantically smeared some on my mother's cheeks and pulled her back into line. When the SS inspector returned, he passed by us. Had he noticed that my mother had returned to her place in line, both of us would have been executed on the spot.

The Zahlappell was followed by heavy physical labor. An orchestra composed of female prisoners played military marches as we went off to work. SS guards and their dogs brought up the rear. Heaven help anyone who did not keep pace. By the time we left to work we were exhausted from standing. My job was to push a wheelbarrow loaded with one- hundred pound bags of cement or sand, or with large loads of bricks or stones. All day, back and forth, I pushed the wheelbarrow with my loads.

Later on when the allies were approaching, I was given other work assignments, and marched six kilometers to the Vistula River in order to clear the riverbank of bushes and small trees.

At noon our lunch was served from huge vats. It consisted of watery soup, made from a type of beet or turnip, with fragments floating in it — possibly insect parts. We each received approximately one pint of this ill-tasting brew.

In the midst of all the abuse and maltreatment, there were isolated deeds of compassion. Acts of kindness are appreciated everywhere, but in Auschwitz they could be a matter of life and death. A Hungarian guard once gave me his own hot meal because he had been helped by Jews in his home town, and he was upset by the brutal treatment we received.

The turnip water hardly stemmed my hunger. After lunch, we continued to work until half past four, when we marched back to the camp. Then came one of the most difficult ordeals of the day. All of the work kommandos arrived at the Appellplatz, and the Zahlappell was repeated. We were bone-tired and achy, and in the evening the count took much longer, in order to confirm that no one had tried to escape by remaining outside the camp. We stood for hours, our hands on the shoulders of those standing in front of us. Those who sagged or moved from their spots received sharp blows. Often there would be a second, and even third headcount, for the numbers rarely tallied.

When the Appell was finally over, yet another ordeal awaited us. Our barracks had about a dozen water faucets. On hot and grimy days, I was particularly eager to rinse off the dust and perspiration. The faucets were mobbed by three to four hundred people, more than ten times the amount that could be accommodated.

Weakened by hard labor and poor food, most of us suffered from dysentery. Not only were we weakened by this illness, but relieving oneself was a hardship, as there were only specific times when it was allowed; and like everything else at camp, it had to be done in a hurry. The toilets were housed in a wooden structure set apart from the other barracks. Numerous prisoners sat back to back on holes with primitive seats. Denied the most basic need for privacy and personal hygiene, I survived at the lowest level of existence.

Occasionally, male prisoners who had come to the women's camp to make repairs or work in the sauna or crematoria used the toilets to pass on news: how the war was going, or what new transports arrived and whether they were sent to the crematoria or sent to work.

My mother became seriously ill. She was taken to the "revere," a primitive infirmary within the camp. I continued to work, with a heavy heart, not eased by the daily sight of flames leaping from the chimneys of the crematoria. I was so worried about my mother that I almost forgot that my own life was in danger. When it was time to wash up at the barracks, I rushed to the sinks because I wanted to have enough time to visit my mother at the infirmary. I ran there at risk of being spotted by a guard. It was not permitted to leave the barracks.

When I arrived, I was not allowed to enter the infirmary building. My mother had developed a high fever and was very weak. She hobbled to the door with great difficulty. How she had changed! My once attractive mother had become a skinny old woman. I scarcely would have recognized her had I run into her on the street. I became terrified that her illness and her aged appearance would mark her for the gas chamber.

Inmates whose physical and psychological condition had deteriorated were labeled "Mussulmens," and once identified, were thrown into the dreaded Barracks Number 25. Once a large enough group was amassed, the entire barracks was sent to the gas chamber.

One day I learned that my mother had been placed in Block Number 25. Panicking, I ran to plead her case with the Blockaltesta (Block leader), a Jewish girl. Ordinarily, pleading was useless. A leader would not jeopardize her own life to save another. But once again I had a stroke of luck. As I talked to the Blackaltesta, she realized that she was my distant cousin. To my enormous relief, that night she allowed me to sneak my mother back into the infirmary. This was not the first or

last time I would negotiate to save my mother's life. Earlier, knowing my mother could not survive hard labor, I made a deal with the Stubendienst (barracks cleaning woman). She allowed my mother to stay in the barracks during the day and rest, and I helped the Dienst with her chores. On all fours, I cracked red brick into a pail of water from which I wearily washed the floor. We prisoners were dirty, sick, cold and hungry; but the SS wanted to make sure that the floor of our barracks was spotless.

With experience, I began to know the rules for surviving in Auschwitz. I learned not to whine or complain. I never mentioned my background. Those who knew me at home were impressed that , although I was brought up in a well-to-do home, I didn't put on airs. My goal was to fit in and do as I was told. I didn't want to end up like some of the others who came from genteel backgrounds — such as the women from Belgium and Holland. It went badly for them from the beginning. They could not adjust to the shock of the situation and were quickly demoralized by the harsh treatment and humiliation. They were beaten and broken down almost from the start. When they disappeared, we knew they had been selected.

In contrast, the Jewish peasants from the Carpathian Mountains know how to cope. They were used to a hard life and had been toughened by cruelty and starvation. In Auschwitz, all the rules were reversed. The harder a person's life had been, the easier it was to survive camp. I , too, had become toughened by prison and living as a refugee.

When I became assigned to an Aussenkommando group, I was awakened at two a.m. Lights were flashed in my eyes with the command, "SCHNELL,RAUS!"I stood outside in the dark with the others for three to four hours before marching off to work. The worst part was standing with our hands on the shoulders of the women in front of us. Standing for so many hours in that position, while they went

through the endless count — several times over — I felt as though I were going to collapse, as many did, only to be beaten.

While the weather was mild, we could tolerate the chill night air, but the Polish autumn arrived early, and we huddled together to shield ourselves from the cold wind and rain. We stood outside in every kind of weather — sometimes an autumn downpour soaking us to the bone. My teeth chattered and my body shivered as the icy rain ran through my clothes and overflowed my shoes. I yearned for a soft, warm bed, a slice of bread with butter and a cup of hot coffee.

When I think back, it was amazing that we didn't perish from pnuemonia after standing Zahlappell in the rain, and perhaps going to bed wearing the same wet dress. Was it the spirit of survival that save us or G-d's arm outstretched to protect us?

My mother recovered slowly, staying in the infirmary another three weeks. During this time, I received messages from my father. Soon after my mother recovered, she and I were transferred along with 40 of the "old-timers" from Birkenau to the women's camp of Auschwitz.This was a special camp that was displayed as a model to the Red Cross. (I often wonder if any Red Cross representatives had been curious about the thick, acrid smoke emanating from the crematoria chimneys on the other side of the camp.)

Approximately 4 kilometers from Birkenau, it housed 1,000 women prisoners who worked exclusively for the S.S., washing, sorting and mending laundry. When my mother and I arrived, girls from my hometown who heard of our transfer were waiting for us with fragrant soap and towels. These old-time prisoners who had been in Auschwitz since 1942 were very helpful to each other, and in respect to my father who already had a reputation of honor, were inclined to assist my mother and me.

A female physician, who discovered that my father was working nearby in the male camp, arranged for me to have a dental appointment there. My father was notified of my visit and waited behind the fence in his striped uniform to greet me. I was suffering from Vitamin A deficiency and had an actual hole in my leg because of it. My father was equipped with medication and bandages and treated me through a hole in the fence. Shortly afterwards, my wound healed.

We sorted exquisite linens, removed from a cargo of Belgian Jews who had arrived in Auschwitz. We worked at tables equipped with special measurements for more accurate folding. The finest linens went to the highest ranking officers.

We lived in brick buildings that had housed Russian prisoners of war. We knew they must have been gassed, but were grateful for our good fortune. A large stove in the barracks provided some warmth. We slept on sheets in individual bunks, were permitted to take showers and were issued striped uniforms that though unlined, provided greater protection from the cold. We received better food, including extra rations of bread twice a week, and were allowed to sit down while we ate. On Sunday afternoons we were allowed to visit with each other. None of this dispelled our constant fear of death, because even with improved accommodations, we knew our lives were at risk.

Very few prisoners from Birkenau ever made it here. Our transfer was a stroke of luck. I learned that it had been the act of a prisoner who was responsible for ensuring the correct head count for the entire camp, and whose sister's life had been saved by my father. Now we were near my father, who was working as a physician in the hospital of the male camp.

My first meeting with him took place in the presence of SS guards, and we were permitted to exchange only a few words. Every time we met I fought back tears, wondering if this would be the last time . Our ability to meet at all was a remarkable tribute to my father. Even in Auschwitz, he was recognized as a

devoted physician and compassionate human being. Some of the Germans actually took a liking to him. While this did not dispel our constant fear of death, our situation at that time improved markedly.

In October, the men in our work group became quiet and depressed. They heard there was going to be a "selection" in the male camp. Finally, the ax would fall: first the gas chamber, then the incinerator. The fact that any of them could be selected at anytime acted on them like an exposed nerve, shooting rays of pain through the men whenever they thought of it.

This was my first experience with selection, and at first I was grateful the women were not involved. But when I realized that my father was in danger, I began to tremble with fear. Soon afterwards, a male prisoner handed me a crumpled piece of paper on which my father had scribbled a few words to let me know he had survived the selection.

In December, I became very ill with typhoid, as did many others. I was extremely fortunate to be in Auschwitz at this time, since in Birkenau, typhoid was a death warrant. For four weeks I lay in the hospital with high fever, and became very weak. I sent my father the symptoms of my illness through a female nurse whose husband was a nurse at the men's hospital where my father worked. My father persuaded a Nazi guard to take him to visit me. The guard told my father, "I have children too."

I was shocked to see my father, and so were the other patients. About twenty women lived in the hospital barrack, which consisted of a small room where very sick patients lay and a larger room for recovering patients. The women cried when they saw us together. Even when housed in the same camp, family members were deliberately kept apart -- to further demoralize and dehumanize us.

My father gave me an injection and brought a bottle of some sort of chicken soup received from non-Jewish patients who might have worked outside the camp.

My father examined me, and also looked after the other patients in my hospital room, trying to reassure them. Afterwards he went to the lab, found the slide indicating I had typhoid and destroyed it, thereby saving my life. My father was able to visit me only that one time, and I did not see him again until after the war.

In the hospital, I was both a beneficiary of kindness and witness to it. The nurses allowed a girl named Renee, who had a hyperthyroid condition, to remain in the hospital and work as an attendant. Prisoners with unusual medical conditions were normally sent to Dr. Mengele as subjects for sadistic medical experiments, conducted without anesthesia. Renee in turn nursed me with care, bringing clean basins of warm water with which to wash, when possible a crust of bread and even things for me to read. The additional food helped me recover. Another woman secretly gave birth by candlelight. The nurses let her hold her baby until morning. When she fell asleep, they gently took the baby from her and probably caused a quick and painless death. Years later I learned that Renee had survived Auschwitz and was living in Israel. I have stayed in touch with her.

Although my father and I could not meet each other again, he sent me small parcels of bread, oleo, an onion or radish, and occasionally, some jelly. He received these treasures from appreciative patients who were allowed to receive packages. Non-Jewish Germans, Czechs and Poles had this privilege.

My father had a pair of Tefillin (Phylacteries) with which he tried to pray daily. As a doctor, he was freer than others to move around the camp and he offered the Tefillin to others. He tried to offer his patients spiritual strength as well as medical assistance.

My father risked his life and sent me a Siddur (prayer book). Once I felt better, I stole rare moments to pray fervently to God and ask for His deliverance. I told Him I had done all I could to survive. Now it was up to Him. I never believed that God would desert us, but I knew it was up to me to remain strong, even though

I was not certain that deliverance would ever come. Hope and faith made it possible to carry on.

I was still in the hospital at the end of December when I became aware of an atmosphere crackling with tension. There was much coming and going outside of the hospital and an undercurrent of anxiety. Toward evening the noise grew louder and I heard sounds of moaning and crying. I learned that five Jewish girls were to be hung on the public gallows. They had worked in a munitions factory and stolen ecrazit (explosives) for prisoners working in the crematoria. Those prisoners blew up one of the crematoria and staged a revolt. In the ensuing struggle, sixty Jewish prisoners were shot or hacked to death. Although we mourned for them, we felt proud and grateful that some of us had resisted the Nazis and proven we were not just a bunch of sheep. What's more, crematorium number four was out of commission.

The five heroines went to their deaths with honor. They did not flinch or cry. The prisoners ordered to witness the execution also behaved with dignity. Tragic as it was, we now had something to be proud of. As a hospital patient, I was spared the awful sight of the hanging, but the sister of one of the victim's also was a patient in the hospital, and she lay in the bunk beneath mine. When she realized that she was the only member of her entire family still alive, she became hysterical and tried to slash her wrists

News spread through the camp that the Russian army was approaching. We couldn't predict how the Russian advance would affect us. There was always the possibility that the Germans would try to destroy evidence of their war crimes --- and that included us.

Early in January, the camp and its environs were repeatedly air-bombed. It was rumored that the Russians were only thirty kilometers away. This heightened our anxiety about the Germans' intentions. Would they leave us here, and try to

save themselves? Or would they force us to accompany them on their retreat? A forced retreat could only mean more danger and suffering. It also would mean being separated again from my father. Just when liberation seemed so near! Our worst fears were confirmed: the Germans wanted us removed. They didn't want anyone to discover what they had done.

On January 15, I was released from the hospital. Three days later, on a cold, snowy morning , we were rounded up and marched out of the camp of Auschwitz, escorted by armed SS guards. We began our long journey on foot in deep snow, scantily clothed, shivering with cold and fear. I thought of trying to escape to look for my father, but I realized how futile that would be. Even if the guards would not notice my disappearance, how would I know where to find him? I had no idea whether he was still in the hospital, or, more likely, sent on a forced march like ours. And how could I insure that I would not get shot as an escapee? The brutal truth was I would never survive to see my father again if I tried to find him.

There was nothing to do but keep moving. We were forced to march faster and faster, forced to flee from the Russians who would deliver us — and take our guards as prisoners. The cold wind blew mercilessly as we marched in knee-deep snow drifts, thousands of us — young and old, sick and well — freezing, yet trying not to slow down or stand out in any way. We marched along accompanied by harsh commands and dull thuds. Those who could not keep up were silenced by an iron rod and a blow to the back of the head. Some guards used sticks with stones attached to crack skulls. They were saving ammunition for the front. We marched all night, and we saw hundreds of bodies laying frozen in the snow. I wondered when our strength would expire, and my mother and I would end up like the others.

At about four-thirty in the morning, we were allowed to rest for one hour. I guessed that the guards needed a break. We fell where we stood and settled into the soft snow.

After that respite, we continued marching until mid-afternoon, when we arrived in Pless. By then, we had thrown away even saved remnants of food to make our loads lighter. In Pless, we slept overnight in a barn. Early the next morning, another day of marching began — this time without stops. Many chose to sit down in the snow and freeze to death. The rest of us dragged on, passing ominous landmarks : corpses lined the road. A fine line separated those of us still moving from the bodies we left behind. Exhaustion prevented me from thinking or feeling anything. I kept on moving like a driven animal.

Once again I experienced an instance of human kindness. I was still recuperating from typhoid fever, and had to slow down now and then. One of the guards warned me to go faster, or he would have to kill me. His kindness heartened me and I tried to keep up — only to slow down again. I felt unable to simply place one foot in front of the other. I just wanted to lay down in the snow. This time my mother came to my rescue and our roles reversed. She insisted that I couldn't stop; that we needed one another. And somewhere, she pleaded, father would be waiting. "Come child. You must go on." And on I went; I still don't know from where I got the strength.

The next day we arrived at Leslau and again were led to a barn for the night. This one was so small that we had to sleep with our knees drawn. More and more people were thrown in with us, until no room remained. In the dark, the new arrivals stepped on us. The noise upset the cows, who began to wander, trampling some of the prisoners. Someone lit a candle. The guard was infuriated, and fired his gun to silence the chaos. I was so exhausted that after a while I fell into a deep sleep that lasted for several hours.

It was bitter cold when I woke up. We marched to a railroad station, where we were tossed into open coal cars. By this time, none of us had any food left, and no one knew where we were going or how long it would take to get there.

Hungry, filthy and freezing cold, I stuffed my mouth with snow in a futile effort to quench my hunger and thirst. We rode this way, without eating or drinking, for three days and three nights. Many froze to death or died of hunger. Their bodies were thrown from the open cars.

On January 24th, we arrived at our destination—the infamous concentration camp of Ravensbruck, not far from Berlin. I could bear my hunger pains, but not my thirst. I longed for a cup of steaming water from the locomotive. Someone told me I could get water in exchange for bread or olio. But we had nothing to barter. Late into the night we stood outside in the cold — hungry, freezing, exhausted and devoid of hope. Would we survive long enough to taste freedom? We were finally jammed like a bunch of sardines into the Siemens Barracks. At least we were sheltered from the cold. After the war I wondered if these were the same barracks that once housed slaved laborers who worked for the Siemens Company — part of Hitler's industrial war machine.

My thirst became excruciating. A rumor spread that water was being distributed outside the barracks. I found my way out in the dark, through the crush of bodies, just in time to see a guard spill a pail of water onto the ground. I exploded with rage. "Wouldn't it be better if you just killed us all? Why don't you save yourselves trouble and deliver us from this hell!" I had taken a foolhardy risk, but by that time, crazed with thirst, I no longer cared. The guard must have seen my desperation. He took pity on me and gave me a small container of water. I gulped several times then ran back to my mother with the remainder.

The next day we were transferred to the Straf-Block. The non-Jewish female prisoners we joined there, many of them former prostitutes, looked even stranger than us. They wore turbans to cover their shaven heads. Some of them wore makeup. The Straf-Block was built to accommodate two hundred people, but twice

that number lived there. When we arrived another thousand were added to its population.

Entering the barracks, we were deafened by earsplitting noise . The sound of straw thundering down upon us mingled with the moans of men and women who were being beaten. I searched heavenward, but instead of a sign from God, more dirty straw fell on me. Still, I was grateful to lay on a narrow bed with only three others. Most had to lay on the bare floor.

After arriving in Ravensbruck, I answered a request for prisoners who could speak several languages. I was assigned the job of registering new arrivals. The first day, I received extra rations and was allowed to wash up. When I returned to the barracks, my mother was missing. I found her wandering around outside, in a daze. I quit the job, realizing I had to keep a constant eye on my mother if she were to survive.

We remained in Ravensbruck for three weeks, receiving starvation rations. Then we found ourselves standing on line again at the train station, waiting to be transported to yet another location. Only one thing remained constant — the Nazis were killing us off, constantly and randomly. The guards may have been trying to eliminate all those not worth saving for lack of food and transportation space.

As the train pulled in to the station, we were relieved to see that it was an ordinary passenger train. Apparently, not many German civilians were traveling. We sat on the train an entire night before it began to move. When we reached our new destination, we looked hesitantly out the window, afraid to see what awaited us. We had arrived in Neustadt Gleve, a camp located in Mecklenburg, in northern Germany. A camp for French prisoners of war was located adjacent to us.

The commandant of Neustadt Gleve, a murderess, had been released from prison by the Germans in order to assume her post. The beatings increased, and our new quarters were infested with lice. We itched ferociously and picked at our

clothes and our hair, but couldn't rid ourselves of the vermin. For several days we received no food. Finally, bread was distributed. Breakfast was a cup of bitter brown liquid. Lunch was two and-a-half liters of warm water with vegetable scraps. Within two weeks on this diet we didn't recognize ourselves.

I remember one girl who couldn't bear to starve. One night, overwhelmed by hunger, she ran outside to search for food. She discovered a pile of turnips. A sadistic guard was watching, waiting for the moment right before the girl might have satisfied her hunger. Just as she was about to bite into her precious bit of food, he shot her. The following morning, the Leichenkommandos dragged her starved body to the other piles of corpses. Although the Red Cross had sent food for the prisoners, the Germans never gave it to us.

We were so weak that many fell to the ground during Zahlappell. Nights were the hardest — my hungry stomach prevented me from falling asleep. We tormented ourselves by exchanging elaborate recipes. Day to day, hour to hour, my spirits sank. The French war prisoners let us know that the Allied armies were approaching, but after all the suffering I had endured, I wasn't sure I'd survive until liberation. Sometimes I wondered of anyone in the outside world knew or cared about what was happening to us.

The month of May arrived, and with it the sweet aroma of Spring. The SS and Wehrmacht began behaving oddly. Some didn't bother to shave, and many appeared drunk. Others simply left. Was liberation at hand? If it didn't come immediately, the Germans would find a way to destroy us. The very thought of freedom penetrated my being and made me dizzy with expectation.

We were liberated on May 2, 1945. The fences surrounding us were cut by the neighboring French war prisoners. We trampled over the dead wires with sudden strength. After my first precious taste of freedom, I became conscious of other emotions. Voices cried out: "I am free...where am I to go?" "Where is my

home— my mother, my father, my sisters, my brother? They are all gone." One survivor swooned with pain, and as she cried, others joined her. I was jarred by the agony of these poor lost souls, the harsh reality they faced.

In its escape from the approaching Russian army, the SS had left four thousand starving women to storm its warehouse. We found food in abundance. What wouldn't we have done for even the tiniest portion of it? After gorging ourselves, we suffered from dysentery. Many suffered intestinal disorders for months.

My mother and I found comfortable quarters in what had been housing for civilian German factory workers. Only hours ago we envied their freedom and comfort. Ten women moved into ten beds. Each of us lay down on her own bed and stretched out in luxury. I was slowly returning to civilization.

The next day we awoke on our own. No one chased us outside or forced us to stand in formation. We were free to do as we pleased. I tested my freedom by venturing into town. It was the first time in eleven months that I was able to walk as fast or as slow as I pleased, without vicious dogs or brutal guards behind me.

As we crossed a small forest on the outskirts of town, we noticed a group of officers. The SS men were surrounded by American soldiers. I approached the group, and offered to serve as an interpreter. One of the Americans asked me to order the Germans to hand over their weapons. I dispatched this order without attempting to hide my vengeful smile.

Shortly afterwards, the American army , smartly uniformed and well-equipped, entered town. The remnants of the once arrogant German army, their uniforms reduced to rags, heads bent and faces unshaven, walked in the middle of the road and placed their remaining weapons at their victors' feet. Some of the Americans picked up those weapons, turning them over in their hands. I heard the word "O.K." for the first time, but I instinctively understood what it meant.

Two days later, Mecklenburg became a Russian zone. As soon as the German population discovered that Russians were replacing American soldiers, they left en masse, leaving behind all of their belongings in their haste. Perhaps they had heard rumors about the Russian occupation in other parts of Germany, or were aware of how the German army had behaved to Russian civilians.

One day, a drunk Russian soldier burst into the room my mother and I shared with four other women. He headed straight towards me. My mother got on her hands and knees and begged him to spare me. The six of us were able to shove him onto a bed where he fell into a drunken stupor. We gathered our belongings and fled.

Chaos grew as four thousand former prisoners helped themselves to the spoils left by the fleeing Germans. Some entered bicycle shops, acquiring instant transportation. My friends, my mother and I entered an unoccupied home. Its basement shelves were bursting with jars and cans of food. We grabbed as many as we could carry. The streets looked like a market place. People carried their stolen goods in sheets ripped off beds, abandoned wagons, baby carriages and strollers.

After a week, we grew tired of this sort of existence. I became anxious to return to Topolcany and to find my father. I also was worried about my mother, who had prematurely aged. By then, only four of our group remained — my mother, myself and two others.

We had traveled only a short distance when we were stopped by Russian guards. A bottle of liquor persuaded one of them to let us pass from the Russian zone into the American one. A few days later, they might not have been so agreeable. We continued our journey through woods, enjoying the music of the birds chirping and taking large breaths of the deliciously free air.

This blissful quiet was pierced by gun shots. Panicking, we ran for shelter. To our relief, American soldiers were running through the woods shrieking with glee. World War II was over in Europe!

We continued on for several hours and arrived in Ludwigslust. Once the summer home of the German king Ludwig, the town was aptly named "the joy of Ludwig," boasting several fountains surrounded by well-kept parks. It looked like war had never entered its confines. I found remnants of a German novel and relished the nearly forgotten pleasure of reading a book while enjoying the outdoors.

American soldiers were headquartered in Ludwigslust. Black American army cooks moved to the beat of jazz music as they prepared delicious smelling food on the street. I had forgotten that people could laugh and sing. As soon as the American soldiers saw us, they led us to a house and ordered its German inhabitants to vacate. We were treated with gentleness and compassion. They served us milk and bread before helping themselves. I would have liked to remain in Ludwiglust, but we were growing tired of wandering and wanted to re-establish ourselves at home. We had to find a way to return to Slovakia and learn about my father. There had been no news of him for several months, and experience had taught me to expect the worst.

I learned that a bus of French prisoners was departing from Ludwigslust towards our destination. My mother and I managed to board the bus by pretending to be part of the group. After hours on the road, we stopped overnight at a camp run by Americans. Volunteers had set up tables and we ate meals on real china. Someone played the accordion. A Jewish American solder from Cleveland, Ohio gave his meal to my mother, although she was too ill to eat.

We spent two days at the camp, then reboarded the bus. After a two hundred kilometer trip, we arrived in Celle, the location of a former Nazi camp for captured Czech and Slovak partisans. Now the camp was within the British zone and under

their supervision. They helped me procure for my ailing mother a doctor, who prescribed a diet of toast and tea. He also advised me to obtain for my mother better medical attention than the camp could offer. The doctor's wife and daughter had perished near Celle, in Bergen Belsen.

I became the camp interpreter, and my mother and I received a comfortable room, and board. On my 21st birthday, I even received a few gifts. We stayed four weeks. During this time, my body showed the after-effect of prolonged starvation. I developed edema — swelling caused by a lack of nutrients — sustaining a high fever, and had ugly red stripes on my legs. When I prodded my skin it remained indented.

I heard that the Jewish community of Prague had sent a bus to Celle, to return with relatives. I pleaded with the camp's supervisor, a British officer, to reserve seats for my mother and me. Once again we found ourselves on the move, but this time we were nearing our home. The trip only lasted two days but was very difficult. At one point, we were told we would not be able to pass directly from the English into the Russian zone, but had to make a detour. I used my English to explain that we had only enough gas to reach Prague directly. We were permitted to bypass the blockade.

When we arrived in Prague, the Red Cross supplied us with food and money. There we met desperate survivors, mourning the loss of their relatives.

We found a hotel room and remained in Prague long enough to learn that there was no news of my father. We boarded a train to Bratislava, which is only a few hours distance from my home town. In our compartment sat a young woman who had survived three years in concentration camp after being taken from her husband and young baby. She insisted that we stay with her in Bratislava, although she had no idea whether her family still lived there.

When we arrived in Bratislava, we accompanied her to her old address. We were expecting to help her deal with whatever disappointment and tragedy was waiting for her. Instead we were witness to a miracle. The woman's husband was saying his morning prayers, his shoulders draped in a Tallith (prayer shawl), and his back facing the door. We stood there silently, not wanting to disturb him. When he finished his prayers, he turned around, deeply embraced his wife and recited a Bracha (blessing) that is said upon the occurrence of a miracle. Then he knocked on his neighbor's door and brought in a lovely little girl who had been hidden for three years by decent gentiles. This was the first happy event we had seen since our troubles began.

Later that day, my mother and I decided to wash at the public bath, and perhaps get rid of our lice. We had no change of clothing so we had to make do with what we wore on our backs. As we walked along the street, a passerby stopped, thinking he knew us. His name was Mr. Bernfeld, and we recognized him as a merchant from Topolcany who had been a patient of my father. My mother, who always had been one of the best-dressed in our small town, was wearing beggar's clothing. She was forty-seven years old and looked ancient. I was dressed in a skirt made from a piece of fabric I had found in the first house we had entered in Neustadt Gleve. One of our companions there had worked as a skilled seamstress before the war and with no materials to assist her she had fashioned a wrap skirt that I tied at the waist. After Bernfeld confirmed that we were in fact Rosie and Suzi Eisdorfer, he asked us why we looked so forlorn. We told him that my father was missing. He smiled joyously, a messenger of glad tidings, and handed us a scrap of paper that bore my father's name and address in Budapest. It was a medical prescription! My father had survived and was practicing medicine.

We learned that my father had been liberated from Auschwitz in January, and had not been subjected to the death march. The Germans had wanted to shoot

him, along with the other surviving prisoners, most of whom were sick. Jews were first. They were told to line up on one side, Gentiles on the other. When my father saw how distracted the Germans were, he slipped over to the Gentile side. While the Germans were debating whether or not to blow up the entire camp, word came that the Russians were approaching. The Germans abandoned all their plans in an effort to save themselves. When the Russians approached in their heavy white uniforms, the prisoners ran to hug them as though they were angels descended from heaven.

By the time the Russians arrived at Auschwitz, my father had contracted typhoid, probably from treating sick prisoners. He tried to treat his own illness until he could find his way to civilization. Once he arrived in Poprad, Slovakia, he recovered under the care of a physician friend. The adjustment had not been easy, for he had assumed that my mother and I had perished.

My heart lightened when I learned that my father was alive, and I thought my heart would burst from happiness. I closed my eyes and thanked God for sparing our small family. Before we were to travel once again, we went to a kosher kitchen established by the Jewish community of Bratislava. There we ate our first kosher meal since our capture, and received money as well. In Bratislava we met other acquaintances and found someone who was driving to Budapest. Although he had no room in his car, he promised to deliver a message from us to my father.

Soon afterwards, my mother and I joined the crowds at the Bratislava train station, waiting for the next train to Budapest. As the train pulled in, people began to climb onto the steps, and in the commotion, my mother was pushed beneath one of the cars. The train came to a sudden stop. My mother suffered a shock, but only a few bruises. It seemed as though a guardian angel were still protecting us.

In moments the train was filled with passengers, and soon there would be no room for us. The thought of seeing my father endowed me with a sudden burst of

energy, and I lifted up my mother to the train window and pushed her through the bathroom window. I then pulled myself through and sat down with her on the floor of the train, which was crowded with Russian soldiers. The train ride between Bratislava and Budapest usually took three hours, but bombs had destroyed many of the train tracks and repairs had been haphazard. Many of the train's windows were missing. We were well accustomed to putting up with such nuisances.

After twenty-four hours, we finally arrived at the same station from which we had departed as prisoners almost a year ago. This time, members of the Jewish community were waiting for us, equipped with wagons and other vehicles for transporting the sick and injured to the Jewish hospital. The Jews of Budapest returned as a tiny group, though they had left by the thousands. Again, we were confronted by those less fortunate than ourselves — lame people hobbling and tearful mothers patiently holding up enlarged photographs of their children, hoping someone might tell them what had happened to their loved ones.

It was a short walk from the train station to my father's office. As we entered the hallway of the building, the landlady looked askance at us. We were ragged and disheveled. We entered my father's empty waiting room, and collected ourselves as well as we could. My father was inside, examining a patient. After a moment that seemed to last forever, the door opened. There stood my father, expecting to see his next patient. He gazed at us with joy and in disbelief. I put my head on his shoulder as he embraced me and cried from happiness. My mother cried, too, as she put her arms around us.

My father once again took on the responsibility of caring for my mother and me, even with such mundane but bothersome matters as our lice. I, in particular, was practically being eaten up by them. He found us fresh clothing and took us to a restaurant.

We shared our experiences since we last saw each other. When my father told me he wanted to know about everything that had happened to us, I sat down and wrote everything. We learned that my maternal grandparents had survived the war in the Budapest ghetto, but my grandfather had recently become ill and died of pneumonia shortly before our return. My uncle had died, but my aunt and her sons survived. The younger one was taken by the Red Cross to Sweden to recuperate.

Only one member of my father's family had survived. This cousin had been captured with us and taken to prison. Now she was the supervisor of a Budapest home for girls who were orphaned by the war.

My boyfriend Imre also survived and we continued our friendship. I entered the Jewish gymnasium and with the help of a tutor finished three years in one year's time, including the "matura," a difficult examination needed to graduate.

In the summer of 1946, my father decided to return to Topolcany. He wanted to reestablish the practice which had been taken from him in 1941. He also wanted to reclaim the savings accounts that were tied since Slovakia's independence.

We returned to Topolcany, but never got back our old apartment or my father's office. It was a ghost town. My friends were gone; there was not a single Jewish child left. Those Topolcaners who survived left for the United States or Israel, since none of their families had survived. Only the Synagogue had remained, and was still used for services. Gentiles had moved into the homes of Jewish families and acquired their possessions. There were people living in our apartment, and I had to obtain permission from the local police to repossess our furniture. It was a sad and painful homecoming.

We did not remain bitter for long. Our family had survived unspeakable horrors to be reunited. I am forever grateful to God for having spared us. We were the lucky ones. Most of the other survivors found themselves alone — left with the

burden of unbearable memories and facing lives severed from all connections to the past.

With the permission of local officials, we moved some of our old furniture into our much smaller, new apartment. It also became my father's new office.

In the fall, I entered medical school in Bratislava. I rented a room from a family and ate my meals in the Jewish kitchen. The kosher meals were prepared by the Jewish community and the students paid lower rates. I met many other young people who were anxious to forget our experiences and begin fresh lives and went with them to the theatre, movies and dances.

I was studying anatomy and dissecting real bodies, and feeling very important. Soon it was time for the first examination and I wanted to review what we had learned by studying a human skeleton. I met a student named Adam Beer who was gracious enough to lend me his bones to take home on my Christmas break. I carefully wrapped them in the my laundry I had brought home for my mother to wash. Unfortunately, she unwrapped it before I had a chance to warn her what was inside. I knew she had discovered my skeleton when I heard a loud shriek soon after I arrived at my parents home in Topolcany.

In return for Adam's generosity, I brought him some of my mother's baked delicacies when I returned to school. We became friends and our relationship soon grew more serious. When we decided to marry, I brought him to Topolcany to meet my parents. They immediately took a liking to him. My father enjoyed discussing medicine with him and my mother was thrilled that he loved her cooking.

We became engaged and decided to emigrate to the United States. In the fall of 1948 we traveled to the American embassy in Prague to request Visas. We were only able to obtain temporary, student visas since the quotas were filled. I received my visa immediately because I spoke some English. Adam, having no knowledge of English, was told to return in 8 months, after he had time to prepare for the

language exam. I had no desire to leave my fiancee and parents behind and travel alone to a foreign country. But Adam insisted that I leave in order to help him and my parents emigrate.

I received airplane tickets from my father's second cousin who lived in Chicago. In January 1948, Adam and my father traveled with me to Prague, where I boarded a TWA plane for America. After changing planes in London, I sat next to a bearded gentleman, who happened to know my father. I felt better traveling next to someone I could trust. After a 24-hour flight that stopped in Ireland and New Foundland, I arrived in New York,

A former teacher of mine from Topolcany waited for me at the airport and took me to a girl's boarding home. I was shocked by the amounts of food there and the atmosphere of gaiety. Someone asked me if I received my tattoo on a boat.

While working as an au pair for a prominent Jewish family (the Klein's of Barton's Chocolates), I was able to acquire the documents my fiancee needed for his emigration. Adam arrived in New York eight months after me. We got married a few weeks later at a small synagogue on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. We had 25 guests, mostly friends I had known in Europe.

Soon afterwards, we moved to Cleveland, where Adam had an aunt and he had decided to attend the College of Podiatric Medicine. My parents, meanwhile, were nervously awaiting documents that would help them leave Europe and join us in the United States. They were too old to come as students and time was running out since Czechoslovakia was being taken over by Communism and soon the border would close.

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I learned that Canada was a more open immigration policy. Through contacts, I was able to arrange for my parents immigration to Canada 16 months after I had left Europe. When my parents arrived in Montreal, my father was 60 years old. He worked in the Jewish hospital as a resident and in his free time made

housecalls to other recently arrived refugees. He sent me a photograph taken at the hospital of himself and other doctors. He had written on the back, "The first time I was a resident, I learned from them; now, they're learning from me."

During this time he studied for his state board and at the age of 63 became a Canadian citizen and received his medical license. He then started a general practice that soon became one of the busiest and most popular in Montreal.

Unfortunately, a few years later, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and died two years later. My father was very lonely with her and remarried at the age of 68. He continued to practice medicine, becoming a legend in his city. To this day, former patients speak of his dedication and selflessness. He accepted no fee from the poor, and often gave charity anonymously. For example, if he treated a family with a baby, and saw they could not afford a crib, he would send them one. When he died of a heart attack at the age of 81, the streets of Montreal were cordoned off by police at his funeral, to accomodate the throngs who wanted to pay him their last respects. He was buried next to my mother in the Orthodox cemetery of Montreal, and I am truly lucky as a Holocaust survivor to know where my parents are buried and to be able to visit them there. My children had the privilege of knowing their grandparents, and retaining fond memories of them.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, people were plagued by questions. For some, there are no answers. I still wonder about those Germans who claim they weren't aware of what was happening to the Jews. What did those who took over Jewish homes think when the rightful owners never returned to reclaim their possessions? Could anyone pretend nothing was happening when persons they had known disappeared — forever? It was obvious that the people living in our apartment had never expected us to return.

I am often asked what it took to survive. One factor was age. Those in their late teens or early twenties could withstand starvation , slave labor and other hardship, and still recover physically. That is why most survivors are the same age.

My faith in God also gave me strength, as well as the love of my parents and my love for them. When my mother became helpless, I knew I had to remain strong in order to save her. The presence of my father — even unseen — helped me endure. The favors and consideration that he received in return for a lifetime of serving others, helped save our lives. Looking back, it comforts me to know that even under the blackest of circumstances, goodness and unselfishness make an impact. When simple kindness unexpectedly came my way, it boosted my morale and helped me treat others with consideration. In Auschwitz, one way to remain strong was to help others. The sweet old lady who was captured with us by the Nazis desperately wanted a pair of black stockings, because she was ashamed of her bare legs. With the help of my father -- who sometimes received cigarettes, a highly valued bartering item -- I was able to obtain those stocking.

It was constantly necessary to remind oneself to behave humanely, even though we were treated worse than animals, and it was far easier to behave like one.

In the face of endless brutality, it was very easy to give up, and many did. I realized one could not remain passive and survive. It was essential to hold a shred of hope. And at certain critical moments, one had to have sheer luck.

EPILOGUE

These experiences were first recorded in Hungarian in June of 1945, while my memory was fresh. With my daughter, I translated this account into English in 1980. For many years after the war, no one wanted to hear the stories of survivors. It made them feel too uncomfortable, and perhaps guilty. But one day an American friend who is a high school English teacher asked me to tell my story to her

students. Since then, I have recounted my experiences in many high schools and colleges, to students of all color, race and religion. What happened to me in Auschwitz, and to countless others there and in other concentration camps, cannot be forgotten.

I am grateful that I can fulfill an indebtedness to my parents and to G-d for my survival; and above all, that I can fulfill an obligation—however limited—to the memory of all Holocaust sufferers, the many dead, the few still alive.

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